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Over the last several years, LinkedIn® has gained popularity by connecting professionals from around the world. LinkedIn is a business professional, social-networking website that has over 300 million profiles. It is also a source for businesses to promote part-time and full-time jobs and connect with like-minded individuals through topic-focused or genre-specific groups. Overall, LinkedIn is the go-to site to get noticed, find a job and expand one's career. Below are helpful strategies you may wish to incorporate into your online business-networking skill set.

## **Update Your Profile**

With LinkedIn, it is vital to keep your profile up to date. Treat it like your résumé. Individuals who put in the effort of maintaining an updated profile are more likely to land a job over those with out-of-date information.

Consumer and employer business research persistently demonstrate that grabbing viewer attention in the first few seconds is most important. Research conducted via The Ladders®, an online job search site, noted that business recruiters spend only six seconds reviewing a current prospect's résumé. This same rule of thumb applies

online where a simple scroll of the mouse and click of a button is quicker than tossing a piece of paper to the “no” pile.

The LinkedIn profiles are also a source for consumers searching for prospective trainers and coaches. Nielsen Norman Group, an Internet consulting firm, notes that consumers leave websites after 10 to 20 seconds, which may be caused by unclear propositions, confusion or tough navigation. A LinkedIn profile is similar to a website where one only has a few seconds to showcase and demonstrate the important details. Ajia Cherry, certified personal trainer and health coach, states, “The best, and easiest, thing one can do is to keep profiles complete and updated.” This also shows that the professional is thorough and puts forth the necessary effort to stand out amongst the rest. Recommendations are also essential. Fitness professionals may obtain them from current clients, co-workers or employers to showcase skill set, abilities and working relationships. Cherry confirms, “Recommendations are a true testament to you as a professional and they help potential clients decide whether or not to hire you.”

Recommendations are virtual “testimonies,” assuring consumers that they’re making the right decision. These testimonies may validate what the consumer is searching for—such as a knowledgeable, personable or quality fitness professional.

Recommendations and well put together profiles easily catch recruiters’ attention (the “consumer” when shopping for prospective hires). In this case, when they find a profile they like, they will want to learn more about the individual, which includes studying the profile more carefully, or, moving to the next step such as connecting or messaging with the job link.

Below are some beneficial tips on how to rearrange your profile:

- Select a headshot. Avoid pictures that have more than one person as this confuses recruiters. Pictures do not have to be professional quality, but best to choose a neutral background without much “noise.”
- Bullet point your skill set and accomplishments. This allows the eyes to scan easily. Avoid long paragraphs that may keep the busy recruiter from reading.
- Incorporate buzzwords. These include action verbs or descriptive words in your responsibilities such as: create, efficient, growth and innovative.
- Showcase your talent. LinkedIn provides options to upload marketing pieces, articles and videos that further expose your talent.

### **Cultivate Authentic Relationships**

Individuals who sign up on LinkedIn are genuinely interested in creating authentic relationships and networks that may one day benefit their career. Unlike Facebook, where it’s common to friend as many people as possible, LinkedIn connections should be bona fide and not include associating with the masses for the sake of obtaining higher numbers.

“My advice to fitness professionals who want to connect to others is to be genuine and always include a personal note,” Cherry says. “It will get you further than the generic message.” When connecting with someone via LinkedIn, the operating systems create an automatic message that states, *I would like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn*. To show someone that you are serious and sincere, fitness professionals can incorporate an additional sentence or two to demonstrate the interest. This may

include, “I am impressed with your profile and accomplishments.” Or, “I feel our connection would be beneficial as we are both presenters in the industry.”

If you notice that one of your current contacts is a contact of someone you would like to connect with, simply request to be introduced. This is the virtual way of extending contacts and exchanging business cards, as networking in real life would do. An introduction provides a sense of security and trust that the connection is authentic. After connecting with someone, the searcher is brought to a “who you may know” page. Here, one may click a plus sign to connect with a professional, but that does not provide the opportunity to write a personalized message. If wanting to be recognized by someone, after using this method, drop them a message once the association has been made using the same concepts mentioned above.

It should be noted that professionals are on LinkedIn to benefit their career. Therefore, connections should avoid sales tactics and self-promoting services, especially immediately after the initial contact.

Cherry offers, “My best advice is to never force yourself or product on someone else.” Many professionals may not appreciate being sold nutrition products, software systems or marketing services, as this defeats the purpose of LinkedIn. Also refrain from signing up one’s personal email on your business’ newsletter. Professionals should aim to gain consent as taking one’s email from LinkedIn may feel like a violation.

### **Join a Group**

Many LinkedIn users have created fitness, health and wellness groups that anyone may join. This is the ideal place to expand your connections, discover current research or find a job. A lot of individuals post opportunities such as being interviewed for a story or writing an article.

If responding to an opportunity post, follow the instructions. Oftentimes individuals reply with an “I’m interested” note, but don’t actually follow the post’s directions. Read carefully and make sure to take the appropriate steps, which may include emailing or connecting outside of LinkedIn. Remember the six-second rule! Those who follow directions frequently get selected, as mass replies on LinkedIn are hard to follow and remember.

Finally, when reading opinions and research in groups, be sure to maintain your professional image. Putting others down or arguing in a group post not only looks bad, but also may result in being banned from the group. It is ideal to use these groups as a learning forum, since every individual has had their own experience, mentors and educational background.

Those who use LinkedIn often, and correctly, are able to expand their networks and careers in ways that were once never possible. Connecting with others provides insight and understanding of where the world is at in fitness, and possible once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. **AF**

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